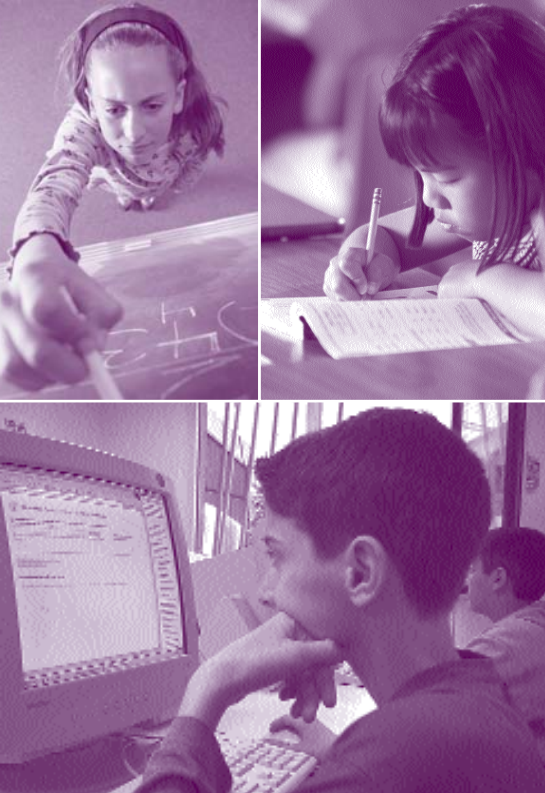


State Representative

Linda Lawson



Session Report



- ✓ Economic Development in Northwest Indiana
- ✓ The New State Budget
- ✓ Fighting Meth
- ✓ New Voter ID Requirements

Economic Development

One of the General Assembly's responsibilities is to provide opportunities for Indiana to create, maintain and increase good-paying jobs in growth areas of our economy. This year's legislature made economic development a priority by passing one of the biggest economic tools ever enacted for north-west Indiana.

For several years, legislators and civic leaders have been working to establish an infrastructure in north-west Indiana that will help encourage and sustain long-term economic success. I am happy to report that we were able to accomplish that goal this session through House Bill 1120.

"The key is transportation, connecting us to Chicago, the nation and the world."

HB 1120 provides a permanent funding stream for the development of a Regional Development Authority in northwest Indiana. This body is the first of its kind in the state and will focus on three

important initiatives—the expansion of the Gary Regional Airport, extended passenger service on the South Shore RR to south

Lake County and Valparaiso, along with improved bus service throughout the county.

With investments in our lakeshore, transportation and other economic development projects, we have set the pace for an economic transformation that will affect generations to come.



New Laws Address Meth Epidemic

It has become a recurring theme each legislative session: the Indiana General Assembly passes new laws designed to stop the production and use of the drug meth. The 2005 session was no different, as we restricted the sale of cold and aller-

gy medicines and other products that contain ephedrine and pseudoephedrine, two ingredients used to make meth.

When this law takes effect on July 1, most stores will be required to keep the drugs in a locked case or behind a counter. In addition, customers will be limited to three grams—about 100 tablets—of the medicines per week. To make a purchase, they will have to show a state or federal ID and sign a logbook.

This legislation is patterned after an Oklahoma law that has helped result in an 80-percent reduction in meth labs found in that state.

Meth is extremely dangerous because it can be made inexpensively using chemicals that are easy to purchase, produces a high that lasts longer than cocaine and causes delusions and psychotic behavior. Since many of the ingredients are highly dangerous, producing meth raises the risk of explosions and contamination.

"This legislation is patterned after a law that resulted in an 80% reduction in meth labs"

INDIANA'S NEW BUDGET

**School Funding Cuts and
Increased Property Taxes**



The new state budget that passed by a narrow margin increases property taxes and, at the same time, cuts funding for local schools. After years of bipartisan efforts to reform education and reduce property taxes, **the current governor and his majority party** have approved a budget that will cut state funding for many schools and raise property taxes by nearly \$850 million.

There are no minimum guarantees in state funding for schools, which means more than 140 school corporations will receive less money. Those corporations will be forced to eliminate teachers, to cut programs and to increase class sizes. Any additional funding for public schools will come primarily from raising local property taxes.

There will be reduced state support through the Property Tax Replacement Credit (PTRC), another move that will increase local property taxes. This eliminates the promise of just three years ago to provide more state support to combat rising property taxes in light of the historic and controversial statewide reassessment.

In addition, funding for the program that provides health care for the elderly, disabled and children will increase by five percent, although bipartisan experts have predicted a 10-percent growth. State assistance for road repairs and improvements will decrease as well.

It is a shame that the legacy of this session will be passage of a budget that turns its back on Indiana's schoolchildren and property taxpayers. For anyone who cares about education and local taxpayers, it is indefensible.



Hundreds of concerned parents rally at the Statehouse to plead for increased education funding.

Surviving Spouses

This session, the General Assembly finally

passed legislation that I have sponsored for the past several years. As



of July 1, the surviving spouses and children of Indiana State Police officers who are killed in the line of duty will be eligible for health care benefits. The individuals in Indiana who choose to sacrifice their own safety for our well-being deserve to have the peace of mind that their families will be taken care of if something should happen to them.

Speed Limits

Hoosier drivers soon will be able to go faster on major roadways in Indiana.

Effective July 1, speed limits on rural sections of interstate



highways will increase from 65 to 70 mph for cars and 60 to 65 mph for trucks. Speed limits on four-lane divided highways will increase from 55 to 60 mph following a study by the Indiana Department of Transportation to ensure the safety of higher speeds on those roads.

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Voter ID Proposal a Flawed Reform Approach

The General Assembly passed a partisan plan to require individuals to show photo identification in order to vote on Election Day. On first glance, this sounds like a good idea. Present your driver's license and you can vote. Who couldn't meet that requirement?

People who live at nursing homes and no longer drive, for one. Women who have married and changed their names, because their driver's licenses will not match their voter registration files. Minorities who have had to

face many barriers in the past to their efforts to vote.



*Citizens fill the House
Chamber for the committee
hearing on the Voter ID bill.*

This idea has been sold as a way to eliminate fraud and restore honesty to the electoral process but **this bill will surely deny some Hoosiers the right to vote.** Individuals without photo IDs will be required to either obtain an ID or cast a provisional ballot on election day. Obtaining ID requires various fees and jumping through bureaucratic hoops, and the provisional ballot system has been plagued with problems in the past, **with as many as half going uncounted due to processing errors.**

And in the end, there is no indication that our electoral process will be any stronger as a result of these changes. The cases of electoral fraud in Indiana have all involved absentee ballots, which this legislation fails to address altogether. As the majority party advanced this proposal, it did not provide a single instance where electoral fraud in Indiana has occurred at a polling site.

Most voters have photo IDs and have no problem showing them. For those who do not have ID, however, this legislation has several major flaws.

A court challenge already has been launched to determine the constitutionality of this law and several organizations, including the AARP and the League of Women Voters, objected to the legislation in its final form. It is my hope that the courts will see how dangerous this precedent is in the virtual disenfranchisement of countless people and overturn this law immediately.



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